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# AIRGRAM

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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State  
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SUBJECT: Travelogue From the Wakhan Corridor

REF :

Because first-hand information about the strategic Wakhan Corridor between the Soviet Union, China and Pakistan is rather scarce, the following comments from a recent visitor there are passed along by the reporting officer, even though he cannot personally evaluate their significance or reliability.

Seventy-five year-old Edward F. Noack (P. O. Box 4916, Sacramento, California) last month climaxed many years of exploration in the Pamir region with an expedition to the Wakhan area to hunt Marco Polo sheep. (He shot an unusually large 57-inch sheep.) Kabul entrepreneur Abdul Wahab Tarzi made the arrangements for a fee of \$2,000.00 and sent along an employee, Sifat Mir, as guide and interpreter.

## Russian Border Security

On the jeep ride from Ishkashim to Qala Panja, Noack observed an improved road running along the Soviet side of the river serving a series of border guard stations. The road was in such good condition that trucks were seen traveling at speeds of 30 to 40 miles an hour along it. There appeared to be very little if any activity other than that connected with border security. Along the way he sighted four steel observation towers reaching 80 to 100 feet into the air manned by soldiers with binoculars. Beside each one were solid whitewashed buildings, and similar groups of buildings were seen at perhaps six to eight other locations along the river. Noack said a large cluster of these buildings was visible from near Qala Panja about six miles up the north fork of the Oxus River.

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Group 3

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The contrast with the Afghan side was particularly striking. The maximum speed for a jeep on the Afghan road is perhaps 10 miles an hour. The Afghan army mans positions opposite each of the steel towers, but they are housed in simple, unpainted mud huts.

There appears to be considerable cooperation between the two sides along the border. On the way out of the corridor, Noack stopped near Qala Panja to shoot some pictures near one of the observation towers. Though he was careful not to point his camera toward the Soviet side, he noticed that the border guards were watching him intently through binoculars. Shortly thereafter a Soviet jeep and a truck appeared and followed his party from the opposite side of the river until they left the corridor. When Noack reached Ishkashim, the Afghan "governor" met him and remarked that the Soviets had radioed him and complained about his photographic activity. The "governor" was not particularly upset, however, and did not pursue the matter. Noack was told that when the Soviets wish to discuss problems in more detail, they hoist a flag which is a signal asking the "governor" to get in his rubber raft and paddle across the river for a meeting.

Royal Representative

For the actual hunting expedition, Noack was turned over to Ali Gohar Sheikh, the "lambadar" or head man of two Tadzhik villages, Sargaz and Baba Tangi. These villages are about four miles apart, are located between Qala Panja and Sarhad-i-Wakhan and together have about 250 residents. Ali Gohar was described as the King's "representative" in the area, particularly in matters concerning the protection and hunting of the Marco Polo sheep. Noack shot his sheep several miles north of Sarhad. Despite Ali Gohar's informal title, Noack said there is a "governor" for the upper Wakhan resident in Qala Panja.

Farthest Reaches

Noack had a recommendation from the Mir of Hunza for the Mir's immediate neighbor to the north, the Kirghiz chieftain Rahman Kul. Rahman Kul lives in the small settlement of Bozai Gumbaz at the very tip of the Wakhan Corridor up against the Chinese border. Rahman Kul came down to Sarhad to meet Noack and invited him to visit Bozai Gumbaz but Noack "did not have time to make the trip". Unlikely as it may seem, Noack thought he could have gone to Bozai Gumbaz if he had wished to. Rahman Kul said that he was in touch with the Mir of Hunza only very infrequently these days. Kul evidently moves down to the lower reaches of the Oxus during the winter to pick up supplies and told Noack, at least, that he trades only with Afghanistan.

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The Silk Route

Noack was particularly interested to find out if any trade still moved over the ancient silk route through the corridor. He was told in Wakhan that there was no such movement of goods and that the people living there are in commercial contact only with Afghanistan. Noack also inquired regarding traffic in hashish while in Afghanistan. He was told that none comes through this route and that, in general, no hashish moves in from the East. Informants told him the hashish in Afghanistan all comes from Iran.

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